

Press Release: 12 April 2023
Larry Achiampong: *Wayfinder*
20 May – 29 October 2023

BALTIC



Larry Achiampong, *Wayfinder*, 2022. Feature-length single-channel 4K film with stereo sound. Commissioned by Turner Contemporary with MK Gallery and Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art. © Larry Achiampong. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022. Courtesy the artist and Copperfield, London

From 20 May 2023, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art will present a major solo exhibition by British-Ghanaian artist Larry Achiampong across the Level 2 and Level 3 galleries. The exhibition will include the artist's debut feature-length film *Wayfinder* (2022) commissioned by Turner Contemporary with MK Gallery and Baltic.

Working in film, sculpture, installation, sound, collage, music and performance, Achiampong draws on his personal and shared heritage to explore class, gender, the intersection between popular culture and the residues of colonisation. His work examines digital identities and constructions of 'the self', offering multiple perspectives that reveal the deeply entrenched inequalities in our society.

Wayfinder is Achiampong's most ambitious film to date. Set in a pandemic in the not-too-distant-future, the film follows the intrepid journey of a young girl, 'The Wanderer' (played by Perside Rodrigues), across England; from Hadrian's Wall in the North to the sea at Margate in the South. The Wanderer passes through different regions, towns and landscapes, encountering people, stories and situations on her way. Presented across six chapters, including 'The North', 'The Land of Smoke' and 'The Kingdom of the East', this epic film explores class and economic exclusion, belonging and displacement, cultural heritage and the meaning of home. The Wanderer acts as a witness to accounts, conversations, places and histories.

Wayfinder considers British traditions of travel and exploration of the sublime landscape and the sea – reflecting on the divisions and crisis in the UK today. Addressing an unreconciled history of empire and inequality, the film combines sweeping shots with poetic voice-over narratives,

melded with real 'vox pop' testimonies, field recordings and an original orchestral score composed by Achiampong. Its cast includes former athlete Anita Neil OLY, who is Britain's first Black female Olympian, musician and artist Mataio Austin Dean, and a voice-over by Ma Toshie and Russell Tovey among others. *Wayfinder* has recently been longlisted for a BAFTA award in 2023 in the category 'Outstanding Debut by a British Writer, Director or Producer', and is the 2023 winner of Aesthetica Prize.

Other works in the exhibition include Achiampong's multi-disciplinary *Relic Traveller* project (2017–ongoing) which envisages a Pan-African alliance of travellers who explore landscapes of the near future, collecting testimonies of those who have been historically oppressed by colonialism, capitalism and globalisation. The artist's *Relic* films are accompanied by flags and a new series of life-size *Relic Traveller* figures (*The Relic Travellers' Alliance: Assembly 1 & 2*, 2021).

In Achiampong's *Glyth* collages (2013–ongoing), the faces of each Black person in the artist's family photos have been replaced with cubist like circles and red lips in these works, referencing his experiences of racism growing up in East London, the Robertson's 'Golliwog' mascot still in circulation until 2002, and the Guy Fawkes mask from Alan Moore's comic *V For Vendetta*.

In the Baltic exhibition, Achiampong will also show his first film, *Sunday's Best* (2016), and the film installation *The Expulsion* (2019). *Sunday's Best* considers how belief systems within the diaspora are influenced by colonial histories in the present day. Located across a number of sites in London including a Roman Catholic church, the film maps out a narrative of coming to terms with the incongruence of faith practices that straddle western and non-western influences.

Achiampong's installation *The Expulsion* is a deeply personal work which references themes of race, class and gender. The work explores the world of migrant workers, cleaners, labourers, janitors, porters, bouncers and sanitation workers. It reflects on societal inequity, and invites us to consider the labour of those who are often unseen, weaving testimonies and daydreams with the monotonous rhythms of physical labour and the weight of frustrating consumerist aspirations in London's West End.

On Baltic's Level 2, Achiampong's *Gaming Room* will showcase many of the video games that have influenced his work and explore the theme of journeying, examples include *Ico*, *Journey*, *Inside*, *Legend of Zelda* and *Ori and the Blind Forest*. This room will include playable consoles.

Larry Achiampong said: *This project feels like a poignant moment for me, not just professionally and as a maker of films, but also personally. It has felt very important and necessary, especially at this point in time to be able to bring this range of subject matter and conversations to the table at what is increasingly becoming a contentious moment of our times. I am so excited to share the expansive vision of this story which marks a new and exciting stage in my art practice.*

The exhibition has been organised by Turner Contemporary with MK Gallery and Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art. The film *Wayfinder* (2022) has been commissioned by Turner Contemporary with MK Gallery and Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art. Supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

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Notes to Editors

Larry Achiampong

Larry Achiampong lives and works in London and Essex. He completed a BA in Mixed Media Fine Art at University of Westminster in 2005 and an MA in Sculpture at The Slade School of Fine Art in 2008. He has exhibited, performed and presented work within the UK and internationally. Recent projects include commissions with Liverpool Biennial (2021); The Line, London (2020); De la Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea (2020) and Art on the Underground (2019/2022). Recent solo exhibitions include *Relic Traveller: Where You and I Come From, We Know That We Are Not Here Forever*, Phi Foundation for Contemporary Art, Montreal (2021); *When the Sky Falls*, John Hansard Gallery, Southampton (2020); *Pan African Flag For The Relic Travellers Alliance & Relic Traveller, Phase 1*, 019, Ghent (2019); *Dividednation*, Primary, Nottingham (2019) and *Larry Achiampong: Relic Traveller – Sank0fa*, Eastside Projects, Birmingham (2018). Achiampong is a recipient of the Stanley Picker Fellowship (2020), the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Award for Artists (2019), and is a Jarman Award nominated artist (2018/2021). In 2023, Achiampong's film *Wayfinder* was awarded the Aesthetica Art Prize.

Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art

Baltic is a major international centre for contemporary art situated on the south bank of the River Tyne in Gateshead, England and has welcomed over eight million visitors since opening to the public in July 2002. BALTIC presents a distinctive and ambitious programme of exhibitions and events, and is a world leader in the presentation and commissioning of contemporary visual art.

Housed in a landmark ex-industrial building, BALTIC consists of 2,600 square metres of art space, making it the UK's largest dedicated contemporary art institution. BALTIC has gained an international reputation for its commissioning of cutting-edge temporary exhibitions. It has presented the work of over 460 artists of 60 nationalities in 220 exhibitions to date.

Baltic is supported by Arts Council England, Gateshead Council and Northumbria University.

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